

226 At night torchlights are used to attract the fish and induce them to rise to the surface, where they are killed by a stroke with the machete; the latter weapon is also used to chop the "sleeping" fishes, which are easily detected with the torches.

Along the river banks and among the rocks the Indians also "feel" for certain fishes and for crustacea.

[262] CATCHING ALLIGATORS.—The tail part of young alligators and crocodiles is also occasionally eaten. These ugly reptiles are caught with the aid of large hooks. Young (61) gives the following account of the manner practiced by the Sumu to catch these repulsive creatures but, needless to say, this applies only to young specimens: "A Sumu Indian, when he sees an alligator near the banks of the river, will boldly swim under water, carrying a native-manufactured rope with a noose in it, until he reaches the creature; he will then dexterously affix the noose to its leg; his companions at the same moment, having hold of the other end of the rope, pull it vigorously, and the alligator is speedily drawn out and despatched."

226 CRUSTACEA AND MOLLUSKS.—Lobsters, crabs, and mollusks (conchs, large whelks, mussels, oysters) are also gathered by the women, and form an important item of food. In the larger lagoons two kinds of edible oysters are common; the smaller one, or mangrove oyster, attaches itself to the roots of the mangrove tree, while the larger one occurs in banks in certain parts of the lagoons.

172 A small bivalve mollusk, known locally as "cockle" (M. and S.: *ahi*), appears to have played in former days an enormous rôle in the food supply. A number of refuse heaps, up to 20 feet in height, consisting of cockle shells intermingled with fragments of domestic utensils of stone, bone, or pottery, have been discovered on the western shore of Bluefields Lagoon. Two of such *tumuli* were examined by the writer on Cucra Point in 1921. They consisted nearly exclusively of the above-mentioned small cockle shell, which mollusk is found in the shallow water of the lagoon. Oyster shells were rare, although extensive oyster banks exist also in certain parts of the Bluefields Lagoon. These shell mounds (shell heaps, kitchen middens, kitchen *débris*), called also by the Danish word *kjøkkenmødding*, indicate undoubtedly old dwelling sites; from their great size it is evident that long periods of time must have been required for their accumulation. A number of them were also found at the site of Bluefields and likewise a little to the north; they have been carried away to "metal" the streets of that town. See also Bell (a: 260; b: 18), Wickham (b: 251-252), and Spinden (532-533).

226 FISHING CHARMS.—Certain charms are said to be very efficacious at fishing. Stones found in the stomach of fishes are highly valued, as their possessor will have good luck in catching that particular species of fish. Heads and spines from the larger species are also

kept in the hut for that purpose. When the Indians catch the palometa fish (M. and S. *trisu*), they return to the water with the bones and throw them in the same spot, believing that by so doing they will always be favored with good luck when fishing for palometa. In case a woman *enciente* eats this fish, however, it will not bite any more during that season. 226 777

HUNTING AND FIGHTING IMPLEMENTS

Weapons naturally play a great rôle among primitive people, for they are used to defend themselves against the wild animals of the forest as well as against their own kind, which is even more dangerous than the beasts of the jungle. Nowadays they are not used any longer in warfare, for the various tribes are at peace, but they still furnish the Indians with the means of procuring a large share of their food supply. 411

DEFENSIVE WEAPONS.—Defensive weapons have gone out of existence since intertribal wars have ceased, but in former days the Miskito employed round shields (*kabaika*) of light wood or of tapir hide. Armors of plaited reed are also reported; they were covered with jaguar skin and ornamented with feathers. The northern Miskito used a breastplate of twisted cotton like that of the Mexicans (Bancroft: I, 723). 713 [77]

BLOWGUN.—The blowpipe or blowgun is said to be still found among the Ulwa of Rio Escondido, but the present writer was unable to obtain any details pertaining to that arm. Lehmann (c: I, 503), however, gives the name *makar* (compare Bribri *makol*) for the blowgun among the Ulwa of Rio Murra, a northern affluent of Rio Escondido. According to Bell (b: 232) the Indian children had little blowguns to blow little balls of black wax through, in order to kill wasps, butterflies, and small house lizards. They were made from a reed, called *brasirpi*, the joints of which are about 1½ feet in length. 411

The use of the blowgun as a hunting and fighting implement would necessarily point to an acquaintance with arrow poison. In fact, Benito Garret y Arlovi in a report from the year 1711 (Peralta, b: 59) states that some of the Miskito used arrow poison. Bancroft (I, 722-723) says that these Indians employed the juice of the manchineel tree (*Hippomane mancinella* L.) to poison arrows and darts, but he fails to indicate the source of his information. It is well known that the Chocó and Tule (Cuna, San Blas) Indians of Panamá, like the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles, poisoned their arrows in former days by dipping them in the milky juice of that tree. I have not seen the tree in question on the Mosquito Coast, nor learned its native name; Ziock (69, 237), however, calls it *liwakumye* in the Miskito 411 278 171

224 coarse and unhealthy and even is taboo. The Miskito call it *tilba*, which name is already mentioned at the end of the seventeenth century in the form *tilba* (M. W.: 311).

LIZARDS.—The largest lizard is the green iguana (*Iguana tuberculata*) which is generally shot while feeding on the river banks or in the branches of some overhanging tree. Sometimes it tries to escape by dashing into the water, where the Indians attempt to catch it by diving after it. It is sometimes kept alive by the Indians until required for food. For this purpose they break the thighs and arm-bones, and put the backbone out of joint; or else they twist the legs and tie the front ones over the back and the hind ones over the tail by their own sinews. The poor animal is thus unable to run away. The eggs of the iguana are also highly esteemed.

BIRDS.—Various species of guans (*Penelope*, *Ortalis*, *Pipile* *), the yellow-crested black curassows (*Cruz* sp.), mountain hens (*Tinamus* sp.), quails (*Ortyx* sp.), partridges (*Odontophorus* sp.), pigeons (*Columba* sp.), and wild ducks (*Cairina moschata*) are esteemed as game birds.

224 RETURN FROM THE CHASE.—After the chase the game is carried on the back to the canoe. When a large animal, as a peccary, has been killed each fore and hind foot are tied together with the aid of withes. 492 The Indian, putting his arms through the loops thus formed, with the beast's head downward, carries it on the back, as if shouldering a knapsack. A strap passing over the forehead may also be attached to help support the load. If the hunters are unable to carry all the game at one time the remainder is hung on the branches of some tree, to keep it out of reach of prowling animals.

224 Arrived at his settlement, the Indian merely takes his arms and paddle and walks home, sending his wife down to the waterside to fetch the game. The hair of the latter is then singed by a fire made in the open. The neighbors, who are generally near relatives, receive a share of the meat.

261 Then a big pot is put on the fire, for the Indians do not think of the morrow and, if possible, consume all the meat at once. The women and children do not have patience enough to wait until it is cooked, but they cut off small slices, which they roast over the hot coals and eat, with a few bananas or plantains. If they are unable to dispose of all the supply on the first day the remainder is barbecued without salt over a slow fire. (See Culinary Arts.)

224 HUNTING CHARMS.—Many charms are used for luck in hunting. 717 Stones or pebbles, found in the stomach of certain animals, are

* The large guan (*Penelope* sp.) is called *kucmu* by the Miskito, a name found already by M. W. (311) in the form *quawmoos*.

[continued]

THE MISKITO AND SUMU INDIANS

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supposed to attract the same species and entice it within gunshot.²²⁴
 The bones, teeth, and skulls of animals killed in the chase are said to have the same power. This explains the presence of animal jawbones, deer skulls, jaguar teeth, and plumes and beaks of birds in every hut. But they are not only preserved as charms but also as trophies, of which the owner is very proud; he will always take pleasure in relating the circumstances under which he killed the game in question, and that in the most exaggerated and animated fashion. Certain objects are also worn as talismans to prevent being harmed by the spirit of the animal killed. 777 ● [523]

WARFARE

WARRIORS HELD IN GREAT ESTEEM.—These primitive people were very warlike by nature in former days and all men were soldiers in case of conflict. Honors depended largely upon success in war. We know that among the Miskito brave warriors were held in great esteem. They were called *taplu* or *tahplu*, a word reminding of the term *tapaligu*, which was applied, according to Oviedo, among the Nicaraos, Chorotega and Chontales to men who had won a hand-to-hand fight in sight of the armies; they were rewarded for their bravery by admission to various warrior classes. 701

MILITARY TRAINING.—The bow and arrow used to be the principal weapon of both tribes under consideration. (See Hunting and Fighting Implements.) From early childhood on the Miskito boys practiced with toy weapons made for them by their fathers. They were able to strike off arrows shot at them, with the aid of a small stick not bigger than the rod of a fowling piece, provided only one was thrown at a time (Dampier: I, 8). 702 868

Up to about 50 years ago the Sumu organized from time to time great festivals, called *asañ lāwāna*, in order to undergo some sort of military training and take the necessary steps to defend their territory against the invasions of the Miskito or the Spaniards. They took place in some secluded part of the forest, where no stranger was liable to intrude, but all the Sumu men from far away made it a point of honor to be present. The women were, however, never admitted; as they were always connected with ceremonial impurity; they remained at an adjoining hut and there prepared the food which was carried to the festival by a number of young boys. 702 [562]

²²⁴ There is a story current among the Sumu about a spotted variety of deer which is extremely rare. If the animal sees the hunter first, the latter will not be able to get it, as none of the shots fired at it will hit. If, on the other hand, he sees the deer first and is able to wound it mortally, the dying animal will vomit a stone; the possession of the latter will enable the hunter to kill many deer in the future. A similar virtue is ascribed by the Ladinos to the green Amazon stones or "*pedras hijadas*" (*Lapis nephriticus*).

liquid to the people present, but none of them dares to inspect it, not being immune from its effects as are the poison doctors and the foreigners. During the last two decades the fear of buried poison has spread to the Tawira-Miskito and to the Sumu; these Indians believe that the Miskito from Rio Coco are especially dangerous on account of their habit of killing their enemies with the aid of buried poison. Certain charms, as, for instance, the bitter antidote bean (*Fevillea cordifolia*), are occasionally carried to ward off the effects of such witch poison. 755

DREAMS.—The Indian pays great attention to dreams (M.: *yapri* *asukkan*; T.: *amana*; U.: *amiana*). When he dreams that he has killed plenty of game he is certain to have good luck in the chase on the following morning. If he dreams of an accident he refuses to leave the settlement during the next few days. When he dreams of strangers, he expects a visit in the near future. The *sukya*, while curing a sick person, invokes friendly spirits in order to obtain from them during the dream information regarding the nature of the illness. 787

HAUNTED TREES.—The silk-cotton tree (see Religion, etc.) and the various species of figs (*Ficus* sp.), especially the giant chilamate or higuero, are said to be haunted. The Indians and Creoles believe that these fig trees flower only during the night and hold the fig to be the true fruit. Any one daring to go under the tree about midnight will be able to see the blossom and after that will be favored with good luck in anything he may attempt. This belief is shared by the ignorant Ladinos, who claim that the fig trees flower only on Good Friday night and that a blanket spread under them at midnight will be covered with small blossoms on the following morning. 824 [777]

MAGIC AND SORCERY: SUKYA, OKULI, SPIRITIST, OBEAH OR VOODOOISM

SHAMANS IN GENERAL.—Among these credulous people a great influence is exercised by the shamans, of which there were formerly only two categories, the *sukya* and the *okuli*. Of the latter there should be only one at a time, but of the former there is one in almost every larger village. In recent years two other sorts of shamans, the *spiritist* and the *obeah man*, have appeared on the coast. 756

These shamans play a great rôle in the life of the Indians, for they act as medicine men, doctors (see Hygiene: Diseases and their cure), augurs, conjurers, magicians, wizards, diviners, rain makers, spell-binders, priests, preachers, teachers, guides, advisors, counsellors, depositaries of tribal traditions, and the like. Their opinions were formerly of the greatest weight in tribal assemblies. Still, there is nothing characteristic about them in the way of ornament or dress.